

## FOCUS SECTION

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# THOMAS AQUINAS: INTEGRATING FAITH AND REASON IN THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

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*The Second Vatican Council, social upheaval, and quickly changing cultural norms were a part of the fabric of life in the 1960s. Values and beliefs held firmly for generations were called into question. Faith, once solid, appeared to some Catholics to turn fluid and doubtful. Though now well over seven centuries old, the work of Thomas Aquinas can itself be understood and appreciated as a response to the demands of philosophical challenges that threatened to make things fall apart. By his fitting together of faith and reason, Aquinas' intellectual approach can serve as a inspiration for educators, especially those at the high school level.*

In the 1960s, Catholic high school teachers in the United States impressed upon their students the importance of literature and science as well as the Catholic faith. There was not thought to be any contradiction between faith and the best that literature and science had to teach. There was a sense of there being something very Catholic about this ultimate lack of opposition between religious and secular knowledge. Students were taught a kind of reverence for literature and for science. The message was broadcast distinctly that Catholics were to respect intellectuals and to avoid the narrow-mindedness of some other types of Christians.

The 1960s also brought on, however, a widespread confusion concerning how religious teaching and secular knowledge fit together. On an existential level, no matter what teachers were trying to tell them, students had to make a choice between the Baltimore Catechism on the one hand and the modern world on the other. The magnetism of sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll exerted a strong attraction to youth in those days to which Catholics were not immune. For many, being an intellectual and being a Catholic no longer seemed to fit together.

The main concern of St. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) was to explore how everything fit together. Laying out how things fit together is the job of the systematic theologian. A common, traditional way to explain Aquinas' role in theology has been to contrast him with Augustine. Augustine (354-430) was a great thinker and writer, but he was not systematic. Augustine's

positions would change somewhat depending upon the occasion and upon what problem or person he was addressing at the moment. Aquinas, on the other hand, laid out everything in a comprehensive and organized manner. Whenever he addressed a particular issue, he did so in a way that was consistent with the way that he addressed all other issues.

Such a sweeping claim needs to be nuanced. Aquinas did change some of his positions over the course of his lifetime. And it would be hard to prove that even his last major work, the *Summa Theologiae* (1265-1273/1989), is consistent in the way that it addresses every question. Still, the basic point remains useful and true. That Aquinas is more fundamentally systematic than Augustine is still a good way to begin thinking about what Aquinas' contribution to the Catholic intellectual tradition has been.

Aquinas wrote many works besides the *Summa Theologiae*. He left behind three additional huge comprehensive tomes: *Commentary on the Sentences* (of Peter Lombard; c.1252-1256/1929); *Compendium Theologiae* (1273/1947); and *Summa contra Gentiles* (1259-1264/1975). He wrote also commentaries on the works of Aristotle and of other philosophers as well as on many books of the Bible. He wrote treatises, translations, lectures, debates, sermons, hymns, and poems on a wide range of philosophical and theological subjects. His collected works, representing about 20 years of professional output, are immense.

Many of these writings help to round out our picture of who Aquinas was and how he thought (Torrell, 1993/1996, 2003; Weisheipl, 1983). The introductory points that follow, though, will focus on the *Summa Theologiae* as a point of entry for understanding his contribution to the Catholic intellectual tradition.

## AQUINAS AMONG THE UPSTART DOMINICANS

It is likely that when Aquinas composed the *Summa Theologiae*, between 1265-1273, he did so specifically with his Dominican order in mind. St. Dominic, whose rule was approved in 1216, had founded the order for the purpose of preaching against the widespread heresy of those known as the Cathars or the Albigensians (Inglis, 2002). The Dominicans operated houses of study spread throughout Europe dedicated to preparing preachers and confessors who could accurately present the faith and defend it against the charges of these heretics. Aquinas referred to the Cathars as Manicheans, because he saw in their teachings basically the same heresy that Augustine had faced in the fourth century when he himself converted from being a Manichee to being a Catholic. Both Manicheans and Cathars were dualists who believed that the spiritual realm was created by the good God and that the material realm was created by an evil demiurge. The Cathars' anti-material beliefs and practices included celibacy, material poverty, and a rejection

of the use of water in baptism and of bread and wine in communion (Lambert, 1998). The Cathars preached against what they judged to be corruption both in what Catholics believed and in how Catholics failed to live up to their own ideals. They were persecuted heavily in the 13th century. Aquinas' emphases on the goodness of all creation and on the working of God's grace through the Sacraments are probably connected to his concern for training Dominican preachers and confessors to address the Cathar heresy.

Aquinas and the Dominicans were not simply defending the status quo against radical protesters. They were in themselves somewhat radical relative to the feudal structures that were beginning to give way to new social patterns (Chenu, 1959/2002). In contrast with the Benedictines, who were tied in with traditional structures of society and had an abbot who functioned somewhat like a feudal lord, the Dominicans stressed Gospel fraternity and elected their community leaders (Chenu, 1959/2002). Aquinas abandoned his prospects in a Benedictine abbey in order to join the upstart Dominicans, much to his family's displeasure. Aquinas was even kidnapped by his family and made to spend a year under virtual house arrest, a tactic that has parallels with modern-day attempts at deprogramming people who have joined cults.

## **THE SUMMA IS LIKE A CATHEDRAL**

Aquinas lived in the time when many of the great cathedrals of Europe were being built. The cathedrals were intended to be beautiful in a particular way. They were meant to communicate the merging of God's glory with human achievement. A pilgrim who visited a cathedral would be struck both by the amazing accomplishment of the people who had built it and, at the same time, by the grandeur and majesty of God. Not only was Christ believed to be both human and divine, but so also was Christ's Church. As Christ's mystical body, the Church was much more than any building, and the building itself was much more than simply a pile of stones.

Medieval art and architecture aimed not only at representation of its subject but even more so at manifestation (Panofsky, 1951). The artistic mentality was influenced by the belief that Christ was not only represented in the elements of the Eucharist, but really present. The grand building intended to express the story of Christ and the Church was erected so as to physically embody the principle of the incarnation. That is, the cathedral was intended to manifest the coming together of the human and the divine. Each nook and cranny, every nave and apse, each fresco and stained-glass window told something of the story of God's revelation through the people of Israel and through Christ and the Spirit. Each part of the story was unique, but many

patterns were repeated thematically and architecturally. An ultimate harmony emerged from the relation of the many varied parts. As Christ had called out to his Father as he hung dying on the cross, so the cross-shaped gothic cathedrals strained to reach up to the heavens.

Various authors have drawn out how the *Summa Theologiae* is like a cathedral (Gilson, 1956/1994; O'Meara, 1997; Panofsky, 1951). It is an immense and grand structure. It examines the sweep of the Christian story as it brings together the working of God and the working of human beings. The vast and comprehensive construction imposes itself on the reader as a whole even as it remains apparent that it is made up of many varied parts. Throughout these varied parts are repeated patterns of basic forms, arguments, and themes.

The building blocks that Aquinas used to construct his *Summa* were inspired by the disputation method that was common in the medieval university setting in which Aquinas worked as a Dominican scholar. Scholars in medieval universities would gather to debate each other publicly on specific disputed questions. Each article in the Summa poses a specific question, such as "Whether, besides philosophy, any further doctrine is required?" Once the question was posed, Aquinas listed various objections that can be raised to anyone who might answer the question in the affirmative. Next, he would say, "On the contrary," and make a statement to challenge the objections, usually including a quote from Scripture. The next step was to say, "I respond that," which introduced his own answer. The response of Aquinas most often agreed with the "on the contrary," though not always. On some questions he took a middle position. Each article has the same basic structure; each is unique, however, not only in the precise question that is addressed but also in the particular way that the form is carried out.

Aquinas ended each article with "replies to objections." Even when he took a stance opposite to the initial objections, however, he took the objections seriously and often used them to nuance his own position. He pointed out:

Just as in a courtroom you can't make a judgment until you have heard both sides of a case; so also, if you are going to be a philosopher, you have to listen to all the thinkers with their opposing positions in order to have more resources for making a good judgment. (as cited in Chenu, 1959/2002, p. 76)

His willingness to concede points and even learn from his academic opponents signaled an attitude that is often thought of as distinctively, though by no means uniquely, a characteristic of Catholic thought: an openness to truth wherever it is found.

Like a cathedral, the *Summa Theologiae* does not just relate Catholic teaching; it manifests it. The *Summa* is a human achievement that communicates and embodies the grandeur and majesty of God. At one point, when Aquinas discusses how God chooses who is to be saved, he uses the analogy of a bricklayer who at any particular point chooses one brick rather than another. Aquinas himself put the *Summa* together somewhat in the manner of a bricklayer, with the various parts of each article serving as his materials. This image can help one to think of how Aquinas worked to make everything fit together, brick by brick, idea by idea.

## FITTINGNESS AND THE INCARNATION

All thinkers work in some way with the principle of getting facts and ideas to fit together. Astrologers interpret reality in such a way as to fit their astrological charts. Modern scientists use empirically based methods to reach conclusions that best fit with the data they collect and study. On the one hand, Aquinas rejected the nonscientific path of astrology. On the other hand, though, he did not employ the empirically precise and critically rigorous methods of modern science. When Aquinas proves a point, he is not giving modern scientific proof; he is offering arguments with which he thinks reasonable people should agree. Nor is he simply deducing conclusions from established premises. Logic was important to Aquinas, and he maintained strict standards of deduction and inference, but these were not his main tools of argument when it came to critical theological questions.

Aquinas' intellectual project was making sense of divine revelation in relation to the best knowledge of his day. Aquinas believed most deeply in the Incarnation; that is, he believed that God had become a human being in Christ. He believed that Christ died a horrible death in order to save human beings from sin. He believed that God raised Jesus from the dead. And he believed that in God there are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Aquinas drew upon Scripture and Christian tradition and the best of classical philosophy, including the then-controversial Aristotle, to express a comprehensive Christian vision in which all things fit together. How do the things that human beings can know only through divine revelation fit together with what human beings know through the use of their reason? How does the divine fit together with the human? How does God's foreknowledge fit together with human freedom? How do faith, hope, and charity fit together with Greek concepts of virtue? How does the plan of a loving God fit together with the bloody death of Jesus?

The Incarnation provided Aquinas not only with his deepest belief but also with his most basic principle for how all things fit together. Much of

ancient wisdom, both philosophical and religious, was based on the premise that the divine and the human cannot mix. Such was the view of Plato, who contrasted a realm of pure ideas with a world of mere physical objects and shadows; to be part of the changing material world was by definition not to belong to the world of eternal and unchanging forms. Such was also, in a different way, the view of Jewish faith, which rejected all graven images of God. How was the transcendent Creator to be represented by mere created things? God is by definition beyond all humanly or earthly representation.

It is against this background that St. Paul wrote:

Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. (I Cor. 1:20-25)

As noted above, the mixing of the spiritual and the material contradicts not only the convictions of the Greeks and the Jews, but of the Manicheans and the Cathars as well.

Aquinas believed that the Incarnation was something to which human beings could not reason on their own, but he also thought that it would not flatly contradict human reason if it were true. Jesus Christ is the example of how the divine and the human can fit together. Ancient wisdom still had much to offer Aquinas, but he needed to reinterpret it with this most crucial of points, the Incarnation, in mind. Throughout various nooks and crannies of the *Summa*, Aquinas is applying to many theological questions the principle of Incarnation, that the eternal and invisible are present and active within the finite and the visible.

## FITTINGNESS AS A STYLE OF ARGUMENT

Some of the styles of argument Aquinas uses may appear strange to contemporary eyes. It was important to Aquinas that what he taught fit with the best of ancient wisdom, even though he was selective concerning what ancient wisdom he put his trust in. He argued some points by an appeal to an authority or master. For example, he wrote that one reason to believe that the sacraments cause grace is that the great saints thought so.

Aquinas held that souls enter a male fetus at 40 days and a female fetus

at 80 days. Why? Because Aristotle said so. Still, the willingness of Aquinas to accept some things on the basis of those recognized as authorities did not prevent him from realizing some limitations in such a method. He himself wrote: “If we resolve the problems posed by faith exclusively by means of authority, we will of course possess the truth—but in empty heads” (as cited in Chenu, 1959/2002, p. 26).

Aquinas more often used fittingness or appropriateness as a type of argument. For example, he gave as one of the reasons that one should believe that Mary, the Mother of God, was ever-virgin is that it would be unfitting to think otherwise. With what would thinking otherwise not fit? The Incarnation, of course. If Jesus is really the Son of God, and if Mary is the Mother of God, and if Mary is in this sense wedded to God, it would not be fitting that Mary would have had relations with a man. What is fitting is what seems appropriate within a Christian vision of the world.

For this reason, Aquinas engaged in various types of argument intended to persuade the reader to see things in a particular way. Aquinas himself claimed that his most basic theological arguments are more like optics than like geometry. In many cases, rather than delivering a clear proof to demonstrate a conclusion, Aquinas tried in various ways to get his reader to see his point. Like the optician, Aquinas had the reader try various lenses until the main points came into focus. This approach corresponds with Aquinas’ reliance on divine revelation to provide a framework or a lens under which human reason can best operate.

Aquinas often explained points by making an analogy, which is itself a way of exploring how two different things fit together. Aquinas explained that sacraments are instrumental causes like the ax that the carpenter uses to make a bed. The analogy is not meant to prove anything, but to get the reader to see the point.

Aquinas developed the principle of analogy as a way of talking about God. The Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) held that we can only say what God is not, not what God is. Moreover, we can only talk about the effects of God’s acts, not directly about God as the cause of those acts. Aquinas spoke approvingly of the negative way of Maimonides. Aquinas added, though, that we are also able to use language in such a way that we can predicate things directly of God, although always analogically with a meaning that transcends the human ability to comprehend. This analogical principle of God-talk is deeply related to the Catholic understanding of representational art, of sacraments, and of the doctrine of the Incarnation by which the Word became Flesh.

Aquinas sometimes argued by making a simple distinction. Was it necessary for Christ to suffer? It depends on what one means by necessary. In some cases the word is an absolute, such as needing to breathe if one is to

live. In other cases the word describes the best way to do something, such as needing to ride a horse on a long journey, even though technically one could have walked. Aquinas thought that it was necessary for Christ to suffer in this second sense, in that it was the best way to accomplish our salvation, not in the sense that it was the only way to do it. The distinction concerning the meaning of the word does not prove anything, but it persuades the reader that one way of seeing things is preferable to another way.

Aquinas would also argue by getting the reader to shift perspective so as to see things in a certain context. How is it, for example, that God's foreknowledge of events does not cancel out human free will? We humans experience things as happening sequentially in time. God, however, experiences the entire universe and all that ever has happened, is happening, or will happen simultaneously for all eternity something like a single, joyous insight. God's knowledge of all things does not take away from the dimension of freedom that exists in relation to us humans as we experience things happening. What is a free act in a particular moment in relation to us remains eternally a free act in the never-ending perception of God. For Aquinas, if an important point does not fit within a particular box, then one may need to get a bigger box. It is all a matter of arriving at the proper fit by achieving the appropriate perspective.

Aquinas at times shifted the reader's perspective by placing one thing within the context of another thing. He took up the question of whether Christ died to pay a ransom for us, a doctrine based on Matthew 20:28 and 1 Timothy 2:6, yet which might be taken to imply that the Father of Jesus is a blood-thirsty God who demanded the death of His Son as payment for sin. Aquinas made sure to address first the deeper point that Jesus' manner of death was part of a shared plan of the Father and the Son. This plan was fitting or appropriate because it enabled God to save us in a way that would express the deepest possible love and would evoke from human beings a loving response in return. For Aquinas, the point that God so loved the world that God would give his only begotten Son to save us establishes a context that precludes the doctrine about ransom from taking on overblown implications. It is appropriate to follow Scripture in saying that Christ paid the ransom for our sins, but this understanding of Christ's passion cannot be taken to imply a blood-thirsty God in contradiction to the already established point about God's loving plan (Levering, 2002).

## **AQUINAS AND THE CATHOLIC FIT WITH THE MODERN WORLD**

Aquinas has been a significant theologian since his own time, though the exact measure of his influence has waxed and waned over the centuries

(Kerr, 2002; Nichols, 2002; O'Meara, 1997). From about the middle of the 19th century until the Second Vatican Council, Aquinas held by far the most sway among Catholic thinkers. In the face of attacks by Protestants and by the modern, secular world, Aquinas was seen as a great resource. If the Protestants lacked a positive understanding of the human person, and if the secular world lacked God, Aquinas was presented as the one thinker who could offer both together. In his encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879), Leo XIII, though acknowledging differences in time and the presence of some errors, promoted the thought of Aquinas in the strongest possible terms:

Among the Scholastic Doctors, the chief and master of all towers Thomas Aquinas, who...is rightly and deservedly esteemed the special bulwark and glory of the Catholic faith. With his spirit at once humble and swift, his memory ready and tenacious, his life spotless throughout, a lover of truth for its own sake, richly endowed with human and divine science, like the sun he heated the world with the warmth of his virtues and filled it with the splendor of his teaching. Philosophy has no part which he did not touch finely at once and thoroughly; on the laws of reasoning, on God and incorporeal substances, on man and other sensible things, on human actions and their principles, he reasoned in such a manner that in him there is wanting neither a full array of questions, nor an apt disposal of the various parts, nor the best method of proceeding, nor soundness of principles or strength of argument, nor clearness and elegance of style, nor a facility for explaining what is abstruse.

Moreover, the Angelic Doctor pushed his philosophic inquiry into the reasons and principles of things, which because they are most comprehensive and contain in their bosom, so to say, the seeds of almost infinite truths, were to be unfolded in good time by later masters and with a goodly yield. And as he also used this philosophic method in the refutation of error, he won this title to distinction for himself: that, single-handed, he victoriously combated the errors of former times, and supplied invincible arms to put those to rout which might in after-times spring up. Again, clearly distinguishing, as is fitting, reason from faith, while happily associating the one with the other, he both preserved the rights and had regard for the dignity of each; so much so, indeed, that reason, borne on the wings of Thomas to its human height, can scarcely rise higher, while faith could scarcely expect more or stronger aids from reason than those which she has already obtained through Thomas. (§§17-18)

These are but two of many paragraphs in which Pope Leo sang the praises of Aquinas. It is important to remember that the subject of the encyclical was the importance of philosophy, which accounts for why Aquinas is treated here as the prime example of a Christian philosopher, as distinct from a theologian. Many contemporary scholars think that, whereas Pope Leo may have had legitimate reasons for speaking of Aquinas in this way in this par-

ticular context, ultimately the distinction between Aquinas as a philosopher and Aquinas as a theologian is misleading (Inglis, 1998). There can be found consistency and integrity in Aquinas' approach to questions, but he did not develop a full-blown philosophy that can somehow be separated from his theology. As Aquinas became the main source for seminary manuals and theology textbooks, however, his works unfortunately were often gleaned as if they contained timeless truths that could be grasped without consideration of their historical context.

Pope Leo (1879), though, had praised Aquinas not so much for his conclusions as for his "philosophic inquiry into the reasons and principles of things," as well as for his method and for his simultaneous regard for reason and faith (§18). One of the pope's main points was that there is no conflict between science and Catholic faith properly understood, and that in fact scholastic philosophy, as best represented by Aquinas, anticipated and supported the best of modern science. Pope Leo thus gave his full support to a burgeoning neo-scholasticism that involved the appropriation of scholastic philosophy into the modern age; neo-Thomism referred specifically to the appropriation of the thought of St. Thomas. In the decades leading up to Vatican II, most Catholic theologians were neo-scholastics and/or neo-Thomists of some kind. There was significant diversity, however, in that there were identifiable periods and various schools of thought within these approaches (O'Meara, 1997).

Two of the most significant of the Thomist thinkers were the French Christian existentialist philosophers Maritain and Gilson. Both argued that Aquinas, properly understood, was a profound existentialist. Maritain (1936/1938) drew upon Aquinas to promote an integral humanism that could blend together the best that philosophy, science, politics, and Christian revelation have to offer. Gilson (1956/1994) argued that the key to understanding the intellectual contribution of Aquinas lies in his distinction between being and essence. Regarding all created things, one can distinguish between what it is and the fact that it exists. This distinction, however, does not work when it comes to God. God's being and God's essence are identical. God is the very act of being. All that is depends upon God for its existence. In the most basic or primary sense, God is the cause of all things.

The distinction between being and essence allowed Aquinas to make a further distinction: there are various types of causes that operate in this universe that are different from the primary causality of God. These secondary causes are real, but they do not compete with God's causality, which is of a completely different order or level. God is ultimately that because of which all things exist and happen; secondary causes are things by which various things exist or happen.

Both Maritain and Gilson took up the baton from Pope Leo by highlighting how Aquinas' philosophy respects the autonomy of the created world, of science, of art, and of philosophy while retaining their ultimate grounding in God and leaving in place the need for Christian revelation. They emphasized how Aquinas drew upon Aristotle to articulate a Christian realism that corrected and surpassed the Platonic idealism of Augustine and of many modern thinkers. They linked idealistic views that presented the material world as one of mere shadowy representations with attitudes that were at least implicitly anti-scientific. Aristotle, on the other hand, started from real existing things, from substances composed of matter and form. In adapting Aristotle and others to the service of Christianity, Aquinas deepened and transformed all that he borrowed. This was not only a philosophy that a physicist could appreciate, but a philosophy that could appreciate a physicist as well.

Maritain and Gilson managed to present their view in a qualified fashion, with acknowledgements of the many ways in which Aquinas was influenced in a positive manner by Plato and, especially, Augustine. A key point, as Gilson (1956/1994) put it, is that "the God of St. Thomas the Christian is the God of St. Augustine" (p. 361). Faith in the Christian God links Augustine and Aquinas in a way that goes beyond any differences in philosophical presuppositions.

## **FITTING AQUINAS INTO A POSTMODERN CONTEXT**

It was in the spirit of Maritain and Gilson's interpretation of Aquinas that U.S. Catholic high school students were educated in the 1960s. The message came through loud and clear that there was no conflict between being a Catholic and engaging in the most serious of contemporary scientific and literary and philosophical pursuits. If in high school or in college students were confused about anything, it was perhaps about why there was not supposed to be a conflict. As many students moved on to college, conflicts between the study of literature and the study of religion seemed inevitable. Respected authors such as James Joyce, for example, communicated the message that Catholic faith was something that a true intellectual would learn to leave behind. The difficulties seemed to go deeper than what even a profound distinction between being and essence would enable one to sort out.

Maritain and Gilson had tried with some success to unearth the spirit of Thomism in a way that would go beyond particular formulas and conclusions, yet in other ways their portrait of Aquinas was pitted against the particular challenges of mid-20th century Europe and America. If on the surface they acknowledged that Aquinas did not supply the answers to modern questions, just below the surface they still presented Aquinas as a kind of philosophical superman who offered an intellectual orientation and wisdom suffi-

cient for subduing the errors of the modern world. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and its aftermath represent a significant change in Catholic self-understanding and in the relationship between the Church and the world. The works of Maritain and Gilson, having themselves contributed to this self-understanding, are no longer in vogue. Many of the problems that Catholics face today have shifted, and even those problems that may be similar have shifted in the ways in which they are understood and expressed.

It was in the interest of Catholic theology after Vatican II that the dominance of Aquinas be curbed in order to achieve a needed balance among various theological sources, approaches, epochs, and schools of thought. Scholars today are likely to stress even more than did Maritain and Gilson the historical context in which Aquinas operated and retrieve with more modesty the Thomistic methods and insights that remain helpful to us today (Barron, 1996; Kerr, 2002; Torrell, 1993/1996). Still, the contemporary relevance of Aquinas remains strong. Davies (2002) concludes an excellent introduction to the thought of Aquinas by summing up his two most important contributions: (a) “He showed the need for theology to be married to philosophy” and (b) “He gives us a solid and reasoned antidote to idolatry” (pp. 181, 184). O’Meara (1997) ends a substantial study of Aquinas with a reflection on Aquinas’ continuing deep influence in the realms of psychology, aesthetics, spirituality, politics, and community.

In recent years Aquinas scholarship has been active and healthy. As Inglis (2002) observes:

The last two decades have witnessed a remarkable resurgence of interest in Aquinas’s account of virtue by writers like Foot, MacIntyre, Jean Porter, Mark Jordan, and Stanley Hauerwas. Writing on topics across the disciplines of philosophy and religious studies, Bruce Marshall and John Milbank represent a contemporary interest in using Aquinas to inquire into questions concerning truth and metaphysics. Therefore, Aquinas continues to be of great importance in different spheres of philosophical activity. (p. 92)

In his encyclical letter *Fides et Ratio* (1998), John Paul II gives very high praise to Aquinas and his contribution in a way that emphasizes both the historical context and the enduring spiritual insights of the angelic doctor. He quotes favorably from Pope Leo XIII’s *Aeterni Patris* how Aquinas’ “thought scales ‘heights unthinkable to human intelligence’” (§44).

## MAKING IT ALL FIT TOGETHER

In the face of the continuing struggle by Catholics to align their faith with their intellectual life, Aquinas fits into the world of today in his role as a mas-

ter theological architect and builder. He figured out a way that one could believe in the Incarnation without standing in contradiction with the best of human reason. How is it conceivable that finite beings composed of matter and form are destined for an eternal happiness consisting in a blessed vision of an invisible God who is completely beyond their comprehension? Aquinas worked out his answers in concrete and specific ways, issue by issue, question by question, with consistency, thoroughness, depth, and fairness. If not every one of his answers are precisely suitable to be today's answers, in a deep sense one can say that his endeavor remains our endeavor.

The Second Vatican Council (1965/1990a, 1964/1990b) stressed incul-turation rather than a one-size-fits-all truth. It stressed a universal call to holiness understood as a summons to friendship in community with God, a theme which some contemporary authors have fruitfully explored (GaillarDETz, 2003; Wadell, 1991, 1992, 2002). One might be tempted to think that today Catholics are called to build fewer cathedrals, write fewer Summas, and develop more strategies for building and nourishing small faith communities within parishes that are already too large. As one thinks about Aquinas and the early Dominicans, however, one cannot be narrow-minded about these possibilities. The figure of Aquinas stretches one to consider these goals not as mutually exclusive but rather as mutually supportive. Perhaps these goals are even necessary to each other, though that would of course depend upon how one would define necessary. St. Thomas, one can bet, could find a way to make them fit together.

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